

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, before my colleagues begin, I think it is important for us to point out where we are here on December 16, 2009. We are now almost a year into the discussion and debate about "reforming health care in America" and we still do not know what is in the bill. We still do not know the specifics of what we are considering here.

I have had the honor of serving here for a long period of time, but I have never seen a process like this. I have never seen a situation where a major piece of legislation is not before the body and is somehow being negotiated and renegotiated amongst the other side. Meanwhile, according to the Washington Post this morning, a newspaper I always have the utmost trust and confidence in—I wish to say the title is "Public cooling to health-care reform as debate drags on, poll finds."

As the Senate struggles to meet a self-imposed, year-end deadline to complete work on legislation to overhaul the nation's health-care system, a new Washington Post-ABC News poll finds the public generally fearful that a revamped system would bring higher costs while worsening the quality of their care.

A remarkable commentary about where we are in this legislation. One of the interesting things is this poll goes back to April, where in April, 57 percent of the American people approved and 29 disapproved of the President's handling of health care. Today it is 53 disapprove and 44 approve, which means the American people, the more they find out about this, the less they like it and the more concerned they are. According to this poll again:

Medicare is the Government health insurance program for people 65 and older. Do you think health-care reform would strengthen the Medicare program, weaken Medicare or have no effect on it?

American people have figured it out. Amongst seniors, those who are in Medicare, 12 percent say it would strengthen, 22 percent no effect, and 57 percent of seniors in America believe—and they are correct—that this proposal would weaken Medicare, the benefit they paid into and that they have earned.

Let me say it again: I plead with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and the majority leader. Let's stop this. The American people do not approve of it. Let's sit down and work together; let's have real negotiations; let's even have the C-SPAN cameras in, as the President promised October a year ago. This present legislation spends too much, taxes too much, and reduces benefits for American citizens as far as overall health care is concerned, including Medicare, as the American people have figured out.

I welcome my colleagues here. I see Dr. COBURN is here. Let me restate: It is time to say stop. It is time to start listening to the American people. It is time to start being straightforward with the American people because the American people need to know what we are doing and they do not. The distin-

guished Senator from Illinois, last Friday when I asked him what is in the bill, said none of us know what is in the bill.

I ask my friend from Oklahoma, isn't what is happening—we have a proposal, we send it to CBO, CBO sends back numbers they do not like so they try to fix it, send it back to CBO, they send it back again. That is why only one Senator, the majority leader, knows what is going on.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. MCCAIN. What is the parliamentary situation, I ask the President?

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I was under the impression there would be a 30-minute allocation for colloquy for our side. I am not sure when we start that process.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican side has 25 minutes 15 seconds.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. How many?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 25 minutes 15 seconds.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I thank the Chair. I think I have made my point here. I wish to yield. I ask unanimous consent to have a colloquy with the Senator from South Dakota, the Senator from Texas, the Senator from Oklahoma, and the Senator from Wyoming.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COBURN. If I might respond to the question of the Senator, one of the things our President has promised is transparency. We are going to see at sometime in the next week or 10 days another bill—whatever the deal is. It would seem to me that 72 hours with a complete CBO score, much like was asked by 12 Members on their side, before we have to take up or make any maneuvers on that, would be something everybody could agree to since nobody knows, except HARRY REID and the CBO, what is in this bill now. At a later time, after we finish this colloquy, I will be making that unanimous consent request.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I thank the Senator from Oklahoma. I think it is very important that before we start talking about passing a bill or having a cloture on a bill—I think the Senator from Oklahoma is making the main point. I think the Senator from Oklahoma was making a very good point that I was hoping to work with him on and that is: Where are we now? The Republicans have put forward reform alternatives for our health care system that are not a government takeover and are not going to be \$½ trillion in taxes and are not going to be \$½ trillion in Medicare cuts.

The Republican proposals would do what health care reform should do—they would lower cost. They would increase risk pools so that small business would be able to offer health care coverage for their employees. They would have medical malpractice reform so we would be able to lower the cost of frivo-

lous lawsuits, cutting over \$50 billion out of the costs of health care, making it more accessible for more people. They would give tax credits for individuals who would buy their own health care coverage to offset that cost.

None of that would be a big government takeover of health care. That is what we have been trying to put forward here. But we have not had a seat at the table. We have not had the capability to say what our proposals would be because we have not even seen the proposed new bill yet. We have been talking about the tax increases that are going to burden small business at a very hard time for this country's economy and we have also been talking about \$½ trillion in Medicare cuts, which I think has caused many senior citizens to say: Wait a minute, I don't want my Medicare options cut. I don't want Medicare Advantage to be virtually taken away.

That is why we are here today, because the pending business before the Senate is the Hutchison-Thune motion to recommit this bill to do a simple thing. It is to say that you will not start collecting the taxes until the program is in place. It is very simple. It is the American sense of fair play, and that is that you do not start collecting taxes before you have a program that you might want to buy into. That is what the Hutchison-Thune motion to recommit does. It is very simple. It is a matter of fair play. I even question whether we have the right to pass taxes for 4 years before you would ever see a program put in place.

We are going to try to do what is right by this body. That is to say, the \$100 billion in new taxes that will start next month—3 weeks from now—will not start until there is a program put in place. Because right now \$100 billion in new taxes starts next month but there is no program that anyone can sign up for that will supposedly make it easier to get health care coverage in this country until 2014, 4 years away.

I ask my colleague, the distinguished ranking member of the Finance Committee, if he believes all these new taxes would be fair to start before we could ever see a program—not 1 year from now, not 2, not 3 but 4 years from now. I ask the distinguished ranking member of the Finance Committee if he believes it would be fair for us to start the taxes in 3 weeks and then not start the program for 4 years. Does that seem like a fair concept?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASEY). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the Senator is absolutely right. Let me emphasize it this way. I was on a radio program in Iowa yesterday, where a lady called me, and I had been saying, as the Senator has just said, that you have to wait until 2014 for this program to go into effect. She said: You are telling me you are going to pass this bill right now, but we have to wait until 2014 until we get any benefit from it? She didn't talk about the taxes, as the